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SUBJECT: MEXICO SUPPORTS UPDATING AGREEMENT ON NATURAL
DISASTER COOPERATION

11. The Government of Mexico welcomes the opportunity to expand bilateral cooperation to respond to natural or man-made disasters and to update the 1980 agreement entitled "Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Mexican States on Cooperation in Cases of Natural Disasters." The Calderon Administration has demonstrated a refreshing openness in accepting international aid in response to national disasters, and a justifiable pride that Mexico has delivered aid to help its neighbors during similar crises, such as Hurricane Katrina and recent fires in Southern California. This open door in dealing with natural disasters is consistent with the unprecedented practical cooperation Mission is experiencing across the broad spectrum of our relationship - in law enforcement (anti-narcotics, anti-organized crime), disaster response, and facilitating legitimate trade (e.g. March 2007 Bush-Calderon agreement in Merida committing both governments to cooperate to facilitate the flow of legitimate commerce across our common border). Disaster relief is the latest example of GOM interest in working practically with the USG to address shared problems across our common border.

12. Reftel demarche was delivered December 17 by poloff and USAID's Mission Disaster Relief Officer in a meeting with the Mexican Foreign Ministry's (SRE) Alejandro Estivill Castro, Director General of the North American Office, and Maximo Romero Jimenez, Deputy Director of the Economic Relations and International Cooperation Unit. Mexican officials expressed strong interest in reviving the U.S.-Mexican 1980 agreement on natural disasters as follow-up to last August's SPP meeting in Montebello. Estivill noted that the 1980 agreement was out-of-date)- several Mexican institutions identified no longer exist)- and doesn't fully tap the potential for us to do more cooperatively to better address natural disasters. He maintained the GOM would seek to develop draft amendments to our 1980 agreement that SRE could discuss with Emboffs the week of 1/21 and with Washington counterparts the week of 1/28. Estivill envisioned Mexico's delegation to Washington being led by the Director of SRE's Economic Relations and International Cooperation Unit accompanied by representatives from Mexico's Ministry of Government/Office of Civil Protection, Health Ministry, Environmental Ministry, Ministry of Social Development, the Armed Forces (Army and Navy), Finance Ministry, and Ministry of Communication and Transportation.

13. Estivill was aware that USAID had sponsored a number of seminars over the past year in Central America and the Caribbean to better prepare for and respond to natural disasters. He conveyed Mexico's desire to work with its SPP partners to foster a deeper sense of a "North American identity" part and parcel of which we would coordinate efforts to assist other nations in the region on natural disaster relief. Romero mentioned that Mexico's Congress was working on legislation to create a new, semi-autonomous office within the Foreign Ministry that would receive and

administer foreign assistance targeted for disaster relief in Mexico, but which would also obtain GOM funding to extend disaster relief to other States in need. Notwithstanding the obstacles, he hoped Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. could begin to consider creating a joint fund for disaster relief in the region in furtherance of the concept of a North American identity. He acknowledged it was probably premature to address this kind of mechanism in the context of our current agreement.

¶4. The SRE's Deputy Director for North America, Sergio Zapata, wondered about Canada's role in discussing natural disaster relief in the context of the SPP. USAID's Mission Disaster Relief Officer explained that we considered it simpler to discuss these matters bilaterally first in the context of our respective cooperation agreements. Once those agreements were renewed, we would all be in a better position to coordinate and reconcile our efforts on a trilateral level. Estivill appreciated this approach and signaled Mexico would approach Canada similarly on a bilateral level to ensure Mexico's agreement with the Canadians was updated.

¶5. David Najera, the SRE's Advisor on Special Issues (Drug Trafficking, TIP, etc.) understood NorthCom assumed a role in the U.S. domestically and internationally in facilitating disaster relief. He urged we consider the role "security" assumes in addressing disaster relief and recommended we reflect on how to ensure NorthCom's special role is considered as we move forward in discussing how to improve our cooperation. USAID's Mission Disaster Relief Officer spoke to the contribution NorthCom makes to disaster relief efforts. USAID, under the direction of the Embassy Front Office, assumes the lead for coordinating USG assistance overseas on natural disasters, including NorthCom.

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¶6. Mexico-U.S. relations on disaster relief coordination stand at an all-time high. The Calderon Administration's first experience in disaster management came a few months ago with Hurricane Dean. Embassy senior management worked directly with Mexican counterparts to explain how the USG delivers emergency assistance through grants, primarily through NGOs, yet expects to coordinate all assistance efforts through the GOM. Mexico accepted U.S. assistance for Hurricane Dean, and used those lessons in a broader international relief response to the recent floods in Tabasco and Chiapas. In the case of these massive floods, SRE reached out to the broader international community, and requested specific assistance from the U.S. (Note. The GOM has been reluctant about this kind of approach in the past. End Note.) This unprecedented relationship can be attributed, at least in part, to more open communication at all levels and a clear understanding that it is perfectly normal for countries to help their neighbors since each has its share of natural disasters that directly or indirectly affect the other. Mexico was pleased to have been able to assist the U.S. during the recent California fires and following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. On December 14, the SRE and Tabasco State officials gave international donors a two hour presentation on how international funds were used to respond to the floods and the progress achieved to date.

¶7. Comment. Mexico is serious about reviving and revising our 1980 agreement on national disasters. It sees ways we can better define our efforts while keeping the agreement flexible. The national government recognizes there are many city-to-city and state-to-state efforts to respond to localized disasters (floods, fires, etc.). GOM officials recognized that the national government does not want to hinder these city and state level activities, yet there is a need for better communication and coordination between local and federal levels. SRE welcomes our seeking to update the agreement as a deliverable for the February meeting at the Minister-level, but recognizes the limited time to accomplish that. Mexico requested we identify a contact office/person

in the Washington that its Embassy could approach on this matter. The GOM also requested we let them know which USG offices will participate in the meeting in Washington in January; providing that info may also prompt them to cut back on their numbers. Embassy Mexico suggests that much of the preliminary discussions can be held in Mexico City with Embassy staff representing USG interests. We will develop for Washington's consideration a list of elements we would suggest be integrated into an updated agreement and would like to proceed with discussions here to better lay the ground work for productive formal meetings in Washington that result in a revised bilateral agreement.

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